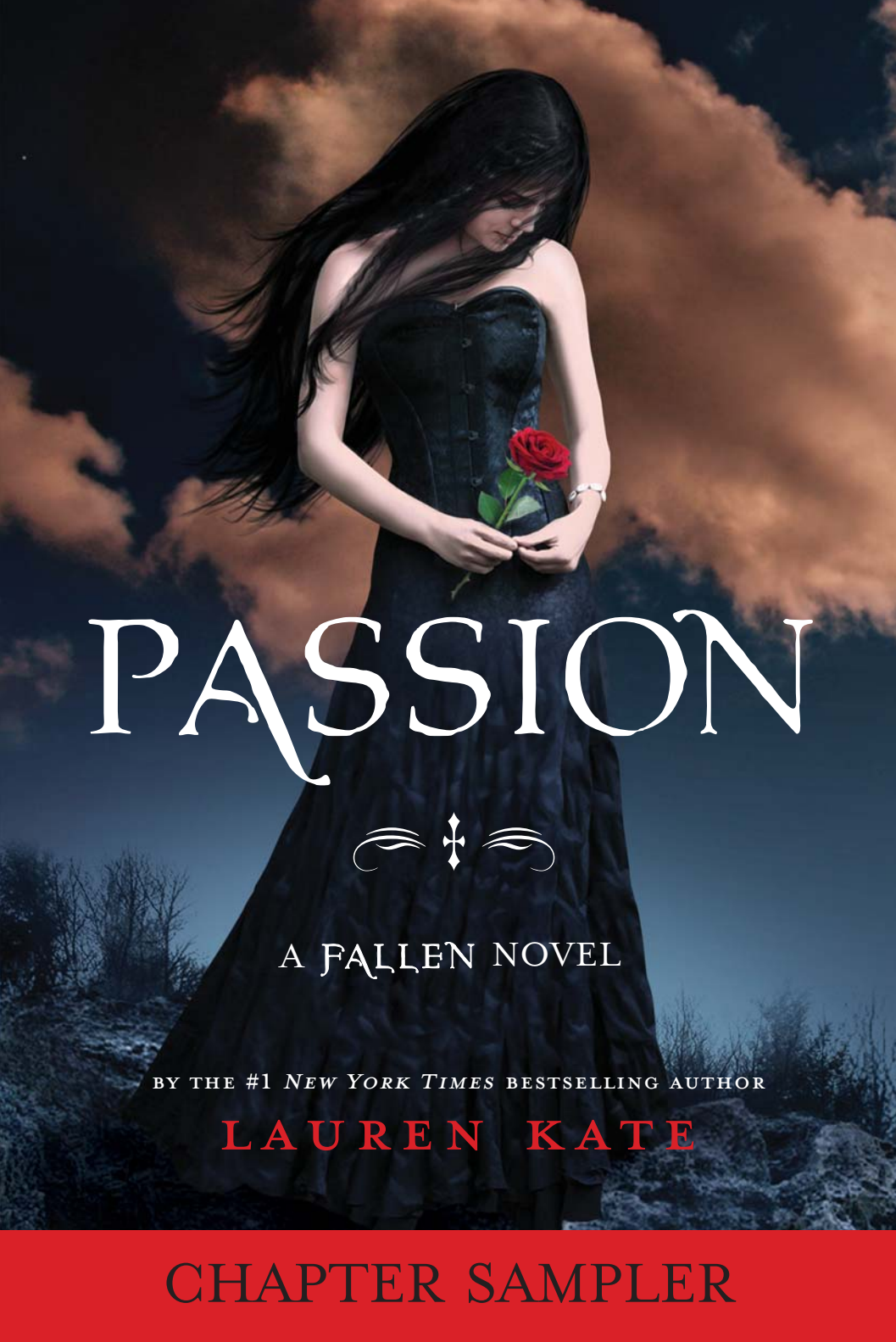


A woman with long, dark, flowing hair is shown from the waist up, looking down at a single red rose she is holding with both hands. She is wearing a black, strapless corset-style dress with a full skirt. The background is a dramatic sky with large, dark, and orange-tinted clouds. The overall mood is gothic and romantic.

PASSION



A *FALLEN* NOVEL

BY THE #1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

LAUREN KATE

CHAPTER SAMPLER



LOVE BEGINS



Before Luce and Daniel met
at Sword & Cross, before they
fought immortals at Shoreline,
they lived many lives. . . .

Keep reading for a sneak peek . . .



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PROLOGUE



DARK HORSE

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY • NOVEMBER 27, 2009

A shot rang out. A broad gate banged open. A pounding of horses' hooves echoed around the track like a massive clap of thunder.

"And they're off!"

Sophia Bliss adjusted the wide brim of her feathered hat. It was a muted shade of mauve, twenty-seven inches in diameter, with a drop-down chiffon veil. Large enough to make her look like a proper horseracing enthusiast, not so gaudy as to attract undue attention.

Three hats had been special-ordered from the same milliner in Hilton Head for the race that day. One—a butter-yellow bonnet—capped the snow-white head of Lyrica Crisp, who was sitting to the left of Miss Sophia, enjoying a corned beef sandwich. The other—a sea-foam-green felt hat with a fat polka-dotted satin ribbon—crowned the jet-black mane of Vivina Sole, who sat looking deceptively demure with her white-gloved hands crossed over her lap to Miss Sophia’s right.

“Glorious day for a race,” Lyrica said. At 136 years old, she was the youngest of the Elders of Zhsmaelim. She wiped a dot of mustard from the corner of her mouth. “Can you believe it’s my first time at the tracks?”

“Shhh,” Sophia hissed. Lyrica was such a twit. Today was not about horses at all, but rather a clandestine meeting of great minds. So what if the other great minds didn’t happen to have shown up yet? They would be here. At this perfectly neutral location set forth in the gold letterpress invitation Sophia had received from an unknown sender. The others would be here to reveal themselves and come up with a plan of attack together. Any minute now. She hoped.

“Lovely day, lovely sport,” Vivina said dryly. “Pity *our* horse in this race doesn’t run in easy circles like these fillies. Isn’t it, Sophia? Tough to wager where the thoroughbred Lucinda will finish.”

“I said *shhh*,” Sophia whispered. “Bite your cavalier tongue. There are spies everywhere.”

“You’re paranoid,” Vivina said, drawing a high giggle from Lyrica.

“I’m what’s left,” Sophia said.

There used to be so many more—twenty-four Elders at the peak of the Zhsmaelim. A cluster of mortals, immortals, and a few transeternals, like Sophia herself. An axis of knowledge and passion and faith with a single uniting goal: to restore the world to its prelapsarian state, that brief, glorious moment before the angels’ Fall. For better or for worse.

It was written, plain as day, in the code they’d drawn up together and had each signed: *For better or for worse.*

Because really, it could go either way.

Every coin had two sides. Heads and tails. Light and dark. Good and—

Well, the fact that the other Elders hadn’t prepared themselves for both options was not Sophia’s fault. It was, however, her cross to bear when one by one they sent in notices of their withdrawal. *Your purposes grow too dark. Or: The organization’s standards have fallen. Or: The Elders have strayed too far from the original code.* The first flurry of letters arrived, predictably, within a week after the incident with the girl Pennyweather. They couldn’t abide it, they’d claimed, the death of one small insignificant child. One careless moment with a dagger and suddenly the Elders were running scared, all of them fearing the wrath of the Scale.

Cowards.

Sophia did not fear the Scale. Their charge was to parole the fallen, not the righteous. Groundling angels such as Roland Sparks and Arriane Alter. As long as one did not defect from Heaven, one was free to sway a little. Desperate times practically begged for it. Sophia had nearly gone cross-eyed reading the spongy-hearted excuses of the other Elders. But even if she had wanted the defectors back—which she had not—there was nothing to be done.

Sophia Bliss—the school librarian who had only ever served as secretary on the Zhsmaelim board—was now the highest-ranking official among the Elders. There were just twelve of them left. And nine could not be trusted.

So that left the three of them here today in their enormous pastel hats, placing phony bets at the track. And waiting. It was pathetic, the depths to which they'd sunk.

A race came to its end. A staticky loudspeaker announced the winners and the odds for the next race. Well-heeled people and drunks all around them cheered or slumped lower in their seats.

And a girl, about nineteen, with a white-blond ponytail, brown trench coat, and thick, dark sunglasses, walked slowly up the aluminum steps toward the Elders.

Sophia stiffened. Why would *she* be here?

It was next to impossible to tell which direction the girl was looking in, and Sophia was trying hard not to stare. Not that it would matter; the girl wouldn't be able to see her. She was blind. But then—

The Outcast nodded once at Sophia. Oh yes—these fools could see the burning of a person’s soul. It was dim, but Sophia’s life force must still have been visible.

The girl took a seat in the empty row in front of the Elders, facing the track and flipping though a five-dollar tip sheet her blind eyes wouldn’t be able to read.

“Hello.” The Outcast’s voice was a monotone. She didn’t turn around.

“I really don’t know why you’re here,” Miss Sophia said. It was a damp November day in Kentucky, but a sheen of sweat had broken out across her forehead. “Our collaboration ended when your cohorts failed to retrieve the girl. No amount of bitter blabber from the one who calls himself Phillip will change our minds.” Sophia leaned forward, closer to the girl, and wrinkled her nose. “Everyone knows the Outcasts aren’t to be trusted—”

“We are not here on business with you,” the Outcast said, staring straight ahead. “You were but a vessel to get us closer to Lucinda. We remain uninterested in ‘collaborating’ with you.”

“No one cares about your organization these days.” Footsteps on the bleachers.

The boy was tall and slender, with a shaven head and a trench coat to match the girl’s. His sunglasses were the cheap plastic variety found near the batteries at the drugstore.

Phillip slid onto the bleacher right next to Lyrica

Crisp. Like the Outcast girl, he didn't turn to face them when he spoke.

"I'm not surprised to find you here, Sophia." He lowered his sunglasses on his nose, revealing two empty white eyes. "Just disappointed that you didn't feel you could tell me that you'd been invited as well."

Lyrica gasped at the horrible white expanses behind his glasses. Even Vivina lost her cool and reared back. Sophia boiled inside.

The Outcast girl raised a golden card—the same invitation Sophia had received—scissored between her fingers. "We received this." Only, this one looked like it had been written in Braille. Sophia reached for it to make sure, but with a quick movement, the invitation disappeared back inside the girl's trench coat.

"Look, you little punks. I branded your starshots with the emblem of the Elders. You work for *me*—"

"Correction," Phillip said. "The Outcasts work for no one but themselves."

Sophia watched him crane his neck slightly, pretending to follow a horse around the track. She'd always thought it was eerie, the way they gave off the impression that they could see. When everyone knew *he'd* struck the lot of them blind with the flick of a finger.

"Shame you did such a poor job capturing her." Sophia felt her voice rise higher than she knew it should, drawing the eyes of an older couple crossing the grand-

stand. “We were supposed to work together,” she hissed, “to hunt her down, and—and you failed.”

“It would not have mattered one way or another.”

“Come again?”

“She would still be lost in time. It was always her destiny. And the Elders would still be hanging on by a thread. That is yours.”

She wanted to lunge at him, wanted to strangle him until those great white eyes bulged from their sockets. Her dagger felt like it was burning a hole through the calfskin handbag on her lap. If only it had been a star-shot. Sophia was rising from the bleacher when the voice came from behind them.

“Please be seated,” it boomed. “This meeting is now called to order.”

The voice. She knew at once whose it was. Calm and authoritative. Utterly humbling. It made the bleachers quake.

The nearby mortals noticed nothing, but a flush of heat rose on the back of Sophia’s neck. It trickled through her body, numbing her. This was no ordinary fear. This was a crippling, stomach-souring terror. Did she dare to turn around?

The subtlest peek from the corner of her eye revealed a man in a tailored black suit. His dark hair was clipped short under his black hat. The face, kind and attractive, was not particularly memorable. Clean-shaven,

straight-nosed, with brown eyes that felt familiar. Yet Miss Sophia had never seen him before. And still she knew who he was, knew it in the marrow of her bones.

“Where is Cam?” the voice behind them asked. “He was sent an invitation.”

“Probably playing God inside the Announcers. Like the rest of them,” Lyrica blurted out. Sophia swatted her.

“Playing *God*, did you say?”

Sophia searched for the words that would fix a gaffe like that. “Several of the others followed Lucinda backward into time,” she said eventually. “Including two Nephilim. We aren’t sure how many others.”

“Dare I ask,” the voice said, suddenly ice-cold, “why none of *you* elected to go after her?”

Sophia fought to swallow, to breathe. Her most intuitive movements were stunted by panic. “We can’t exactly, well . . . We don’t yet have the capabilities to—”

The Outcast girl cut her off. “The Outcasts are in the process of—”

“Silence,” the voice commanded. “Spare me your excuses. They no longer matter, as you no longer matter.”

For a long time, their group was quiet. It was terrifying not to know how to please him. When he finally spoke, his voice was softer, but no less lethal. “Too much at stake. I can’t leave anything else to chance.”

A pause.

Then, softly, he said, “The time has come for me to take matters into my own hands.”

Sophia bit her gasp in two to hide her horror. But she could not stop her body's tremors. His direct involvement? Truly, it was the most terrifying prospect. She could not imagine working *with* him to—

“The rest of you will stay out of this,” he said. “That is all.”

“But—” It was an accident, but the word escaped Sophia's lips. She could not take it back. But all her decades of labor. All her plans. Her plans!

What came next was a long, earth-shattering roar.

It reverberated up through the bleachers, seeming to travel around the entire racetrack in a splinter of a second.

Sophia cringed. The noise seemed almost to crash *into* her, through her skin and down to her deepest core. She felt as if her heart was being drummed to pieces.

Lyrica and Vivina both pressed against her, eyes clamped shut. Even the Outcasts trembled.

Just when Sophia thought the sound of it would never cease, that it would be the death of her at last, his roar gave way to absolute pin-drop silence.

For a moment.

Enough time to look around and see that the other people at the racetrack had not heard anything at all.

In her ear he whispered, “Your time on this endeavor is up. Do not dare to get in my way.”

Down below, another shot rang out. The broad gate banged open once again. Only this time, the pounding

of horses' hooves against the dirt sounded like practically nothing, like the lightest rainfall falling on a canopy of trees.

Before the racehorses had crossed the starting line, the figure behind them had vanished, leaving only the mark of coal-black hoofprints singed into the planks of the grandstand.

ONE



UNDER FIRE

MOSCOW • OCTOBER 15, 1941

Lucinda!

The voices reached her in the murky darkness.

Come back!

Wait!

She ignored them, pressing further. Echoes of her name bounced off the shadowy walls of the Announcer, sending licks of heat rippling across her skin. Was that Daniel's voice or Cam's? Arriane's or Gabbe's? Was it Roland pleading that she come back now, or was that Miles?

The calls grew harder to discern, until Luce couldn't tell them apart at all: good or evil. Enemy or friend. They should have been easier to separate, but nothing was easy anymore. Everything that had once been black and white now blended into gray.

Of course, both sides agreed on one thing: Everyone wanted to pull her out of the Announcer. For her *protection*, they would claim.

No, thanks.

Not now.

Not after they'd wrecked her parents' backyard, made it into another one of their dusty battlefields. She couldn't think about her parents' faces without wanting to turn back—not like she'd even know how to turn back inside an Announcer, anyway. Besides, it was too late. Cam had tried to *kill* her. Or what he thought was her. And Miles had saved her, but even that wasn't simple. He'd only been able to throw her reflection because he cared about her *too* much.

And Daniel? Did he care enough? She couldn't tell.

In the end, when the Outcast had approached her, Daniel and the others had stared at Luce like *she* was the one who owed *them* something.

You are our entrance into Heaven, the Outcast had told her. *The price*. What had that meant? Until a couple of weeks ago she hadn't even known the Outcasts existed. And yet, they wanted something from her—badly enough

to battle Daniel for it. It must have had to do with the curse, the one that kept Luce reincarnated lifetime after lifetime. But what did they think Luce could do?

Was the answer buried somewhere here?

Her stomach lurched as she tumbled senselessly through the cold shadow, deep inside the chasm of the dark Announcer.

Luce—

The voices began to fade and grow dimmer. Soon they were barely whispers. Almost like they had given up. Until—

They started to grow louder again. Louder and clearer.

Luce—

No. She clamped her eyes shut to try to block them out.

Lucinda—

Lucy—

Lucia—

Luschka—

She was cold and she was tired and she didn't want to hear them. For once, she wanted to be left alone.

Luschka! Luschka! Luschka!

Her feet hit something with a *thwump*.

Something very, very cold.

She was standing on solid ground. She knew she wasn't tumbling anymore, though she couldn't see anything in

front of her except for the blanket of blackness. Then she looked down at her Converse sneakers.

And gulped.

They were planted in a blanket of snow that reached midway up her calves. The dank coolness that she was used to—the shadowy tunnel she’d been traveling through, out of her backyard, into the past—was giving way to something else. Something blustery and absolutely frigid.

The first time Luce had stepped through an Announcer—from her Shoreline dorm room to Las Vegas—she’d been with her friends Shelby and Miles. At the end of the passage they’d met a barrier: a dark, shadowy curtain between them and the city. Because Miles was the only one who’d read the texts on stepping through, he’d started swiping the Announcer with a circular motion until the murky black shadow flaked away. Luce hadn’t known until now that he’d been troubleshooting.

This time, there was no barrier. Maybe because she was traveling alone, through an Announcer summoned of her own fierce will. But the way out was so easy. Almost too easy. The veil of blackness simply parted.

A blast of cold tore into her, making her knees lock with the chill. Her ribs stiffened and her eyes teared in the sharp, sudden wind.

Where was she?

Luce already regretted her panicked jump through time. Yes, she needed an escape, and yes, she wanted to trace her past, to save her former selves from all the pain, to understand what kind of love she'd had with Daniel all those other times. To *feel* it instead of being told about it. To understand—and then fix—whatever curse had been inflicted on Daniel and her.

But not like this. Frozen, alone, and completely unprepared for wherever, whenever she was.

She could see a snowy street in front of her, a steel-gray sky above white buildings. She could hear something rumbling in the distance. But she didn't want to think about what any of it meant.

"Wait," she whispered to the Announcer.

The shadow drifted hazily a foot or so beyond her fingertips. She tried to grasp it, but the Announcer eluded her, flicking farther away. She leaped for it, and caught a tiny damp piece of it between her fingers—

But then, in an instant, the Announcer shattered into soft black fragments on the snow. They faded, then were gone.

"Great," she muttered. "Now what?"

In the distance, the narrow road curved left to meet a shadowy intersection. The sidewalks were piled high with shoveled snow, which had been packed against two long banks of white stone buildings. They were striking, unlike anything Luce had ever seen, a few stories tall,

with their entire façades carved into rows of bright white arches and elaborate columns.

All the windows were dark. Luce got the sense that the whole city might be dark. The only light came from a single gas streetlamp. If there was any moon, it was hidden by a thick blanket of cloud. Again something rumbled in the sky. Thunder?

Luce hugged her arms around her chest. She was freezing.

“Luschka!”

A woman’s voice. Hoarse and raspy, like someone who’d spent her whole life barking orders. But the voice was trembling, too.

“Luschka, you idiot. Where are you?”

She sounded closer now. Was she talking to Luce? There was something else about that voice, something strange that Luce couldn’t quite put into words.

When a figure came hobbling around the snowy street corner, Luce stared at the woman, trying to place her. She was very short and a little hunched over, maybe in her late sixties. Her bulky clothes seemed too big for her body. Her hair was tucked under a thick black scarf. When she saw Luce, her face scrunched into a complicated grimace.

“Where have you been?”

Luce looked around. She was the only other person on the street. The old woman was speaking to her.

“Right here,” she heard herself say.

In Russian.

She clapped a hand over her mouth. So *that* was what had seemed so bizarre about the old woman’s voice: She was speaking a language Luce had never learned. And yet, not only did Luce understand every word, but she could speak it back.

“I could kill you,” the woman said, breathing heavily as she rushed toward Luce and threw her arms around her.

For such a frail-looking woman, her embrace was strong. The warmth of another body pressing into Luce after so much intense cold made her almost want to cry. She hugged back hard.

“Grandma?” she whispered, her lips close to the woman’s ear, somehow knowing that was who the woman was.

“Of all the nights I get off work to find you gone,” the woman said. “Now you’re skipping around in the middle of the street like a lunatic? Did you even go to work today? Where is your sister?”

There was the rumbling in the sky again. It sounded like a bad storm moving closer. Moving fast. Luce shivered and shook her head. She didn’t know.

“Aha,” the woman said. “Not so carefree now.” She squinted at Luce, then pushed her away to get a closer look. “My God, what are you wearing?”

Luce fidgeted as her past life's grandmother gaped at her jeans and ran her knobby fingers over the buttons of Luce's flannel shirt. She grabbed Luce's short, tangled ponytail. "Sometimes I think you are as crazy as your father, may he rest in peace."

"I just—" Luce's teeth were chattering. "I didn't know it was going to be so cold."

The woman spat on the snow to show her disapproval. She peeled off her overcoat. "Take this before you catch your death." She bundled the coat roughly around Luce, whose fingers were half frozen as she struggled to button it. Then her grandmother untied the scarf from her neck and wrapped it around Luce's head.

A great boom in the sky startled both of them. Now Luce knew it wasn't thunder. "What is that?" she whispered.

The old woman stared at her. "The war," she muttered. "Did you lose your wits along with your clothes? Come now. We must go."

As they waded down the snowy street, over the rough cobbles and the tram tracks set into them, Luce realized that the city wasn't empty after all. Few cars were parked along the road, but occasionally, down the darkened side streets, she heard the whinnies of carriage horses waiting for orders, their frosty breaths clotting the air. Silhouetted bodies scampered across rooftops. Down an alley, a man in a torn overcoat helped three small children through the hatched doors of a basement.

At the end of the narrow street, the road opened onto a broad, tree-lined avenue with a wide view of the city. The only cars parked here were military vehicles. They looked old-fashioned, almost absurd, like relics in a war museum: soft-top jeeps with giant fenders, bone-thin steering wheels, and the Soviet hammer and sickle painted onto the doors. But aside from Luce and her grandmother, there were no people on this street. Everything—except for the awful rumbling in the sky—was ghostly, eerily quiet.

In the distance, she could see a river, and far across it, a great building. Even in the darkness, she could make out its elaborate tiered spires and ornate onion-shaped domes, which seemed familiar and mythic at the same time. It took a moment to sink in—and then fear shot through Luce.

She was in Moscow.

And the city was a war zone.

Black smoke rose in the gray sky, marking the pockets of the city that had already been hit: to the left of the vast Kremlin, and just behind it, and again in the distance to the far right. There was no combat on the streets, no sign that enemy soldiers had crossed into the city yet on foot. But the flames licking the charred buildings, the incendiary smell of war everywhere, and the threat of more to come were somehow even worse.

This was by far the most messed-up thing Luce ever done in her life—probably in *any* of her lives. Her

parents would *kill* her if they knew where she was. Daniel might never speak to her again.

But then: What if they didn't even have the chance to be furious with her? She could die, right here in this war zone.

Why had she done this?

Because she'd *had* to. It was hard to unearth that small hint of pride in the midst of her panic. But it must have been there somewhere.

She'd *stepped through*. On her own. Into a distant place and a faraway time, into the past she needed to understand. This was what she'd wanted. She'd been pushed around like a chess piece long enough.

But what was she supposed to do now?

She picked up her pace and held tight to her grandmother's hand. Strange, this woman had no real sense of what Luce was going through, no real idea of who she even was, and yet the tug of her dry grip was the only thing keeping Luce moving.

"Where are we going?" Luce asked as her grandmother yanked her down another darkened street. The cobblestones tapered off and the road became unpaved and slippery. The snow had soaked through the canvas of Luce's tennis shoes, and her toes were starting to burn with the cold.

"To collect your sister, Kristina." The old woman scowled. "The one who works nights digging army

trenches with her bare hands so you can get your beauty rest. Remember her?”

Where they stopped, there was no streetlamp to light the road. Luce blinked a few times to help her eyes adjust. They were standing in front of what looked like a very long ditch, right in the middle of the city.

There must have been a hundred people there. All of them bundled up to their ears. Some were down on their knees, digging with shovels. Some were digging with their hands. Some stood as if frozen, watching the sky. A few soldiers carted off heavy loads of earth and rock in splintery wheelbarrows and farm carts to add to the rubble barricade at the end of the street. Their bodies were hidden under thick army-issue wool coats that billowed out around their knees, but beneath their steel hats, their faces were as gaunt as any of the civilians’. Lucinda understood that they were all working together, the men in uniform and the women and children, turning their city into a fortress, doing anything they could, down to the very last minute, to keep the enemy tanks out.

“Kristina,” her grandmother called, the same notes of panic-washed love in her voice as when she’d been looking for Luce.

A girl appeared at their side almost instantly. “What took you so long?”

Tall and thin, with dark strands of hair escaping from under the porkpie hat on her head, Kristina was so beau-

tiful, Luce had to swallow a lump in her throat. She recognized the girl as family right away.

Seeing Kristina reminded Luce of Vera, another past life's sister. Luce must have had a hundred sisters across time. A thousand. All of them would have gone through something similar. Sisters and brothers and parents and friends whom Luce must have loved, then lost. None of them had known what was coming. All of them had been left behind to grieve.

Maybe there was a way to change that, to make it easier on the people who'd loved her. Maybe that was part of what Luce could do in her past lives.

The great boom of something exploding sounded across town. Close enough that the ground rocked under Luce's feet and her right eardrum felt like it was splitting. On the corner, air-raid sirens started going off.

"Baba." Kristina took hold of her grandmother's arm. She was near tears. "The Nazis—they're here, aren't they?"

The Germans. Luce's first time stepping through time on her own and she'd landed smack in World War II. "They're attacking Moscow?" Her voice wobbled. "Tonight?"

"We should have left town with the others," Kristina said bitterly. "Now it is too late."

"And abandoned your mother and your father and your grandfather, too?" Baba shook her head. "Left them alone in their graves?"

“Better we should join them in the cemetery?” Kristina spat back. She reached for Luce, squeezing her arm. “Did you know about the raid? You and your kulak friend? Is that why you didn’t come to work this morning? You were with him, weren’t you?”

What did her sister think Luce could possibly have known? Who would she have been with?

Who but Daniel?

Of course. Luschka must be with him right now. And if her own family members were confusing *that* Luschka with Luce . . .

Her chest constricted. How much time did she have left before she died? What if Luce could find Luschka before it happened?

“*Luschka.*”

Her sister and grandmother were staring at her.

“What’s wrong with her tonight?” Kristina asked.

“*Let’s go.*” Baba scowled. “You think the Moscovitches are going to hold open their basement forever?”

The long drone of a fighter plane’s propellers sounded over them in the sky. Close enough that when Luce looked up, the dark swastika painted on the underside of its wings was clear. It sent a shiver through her. Then another boom rocked the city, and the air grew caustic with dark smoke. They’d hit something nearby. Two more massive explosions made the ground shudder beneath her feet.

It was chaos on the street. The crowd at the trenches

was disappearing, everyone scattering up a dozen narrow streets. Some hustled down the stairs of the metro station on the corner to wait out the bombs underground; others disappeared into dark doorways.

A block away, Luce caught a glimpse of someone running: a girl, about her age, in a red hat and a long wool coat. She turned her head for just a second before she sprinted on. But it was long enough for Luce to know.

There she was.

Luschka.

She wrestled free of Baba's arm. "I'm sorry. I have to go."

Luce took a deep breath and ran down the street, straight into the roiling smoke, toward the heaviest bombing.

"Are you crazy?" Kristina yelled. But they didn't follow her. They would have had to be crazy themselves.

Luce's feet were numb as she tried to run through the calf-high snow on the sidewalk. When she reached the corner where she'd seen her red-hatted past self dash by, she slowed. Then she sucked in her breath.

A building that took up half of the city block directly in front of her had caved in. White stone was streaked with black ash. A fire churned deep inside the crater in the building's side.

The explosion had spat out heaps of unrecognizable debris from inside the building. The snow was streaked with red. Luce recoiled until she realized that the red

streaks were not blood but shreds of red silk. It must have been a tailor's shop. Several badly singed racks of clothes were scattered in the street. A mannequin lay on its side in a ditch. It was on fire. Luce had to cover her mouth with her grandmother's scarf to keep from choking on the fumes. Everywhere she stepped, shattered glass and stone cut into the snow.

She should turn back, find the grandmother and sister who would help her get to shelter, but she couldn't. She had to find Luschka. She'd never been so close to one of her past selves before. Luschka might be able to help her understand why Luce's own lifetime was different. Why Cam had shot a starshot into her reflection, thinking it was her, and told Daniel, "It was a better end for her." A better end than what?

She slowly turned around, trying to spot the flash of the red hat in the night.

There.

The girl was running downhill toward the river. Luce started running, too.

They ran at precisely the same pace. When Luce ducked at the sound of an explosion, Luschka ducked, too—in a weird echo of Luce's own movement. And when they reached the riverbank, and the city came into view, Luschka froze into the exact same rigid stance as Luce herself.

Fifty yards in front of Luce, her mirror image began to sob.

So much of Moscow was burning. So many homes were being leveled. Luce tried to fathom the other lives being destroyed across the city tonight, but they felt distant and unreachable, like something she'd read about in a history book.

The girl was on the move again. Running so fast Luce couldn't have caught her if she'd wanted to. They ran around giant craters cut into the cobblestone road. They ran past burning buildings, crackling with the awful racket a fire makes when it spreads to a new target. They ran past smashed, overturned military trucks, blackened arms hanging out at the sides.

Then Luschka hooked left down a street and Luce couldn't see her anymore.

Adrenaline kicked in. Luce pressed forward, her feet pounding harder, faster on the snowy street. People only ran this fast when they were desperate. When something bigger than them spurred them on.

Luschka could only be running toward one thing.

"Luschka—"

His voice.

Where was he? For a moment, Luce forgot her past self, forgot the Russian girl whose life was in danger of ending at any moment, forgot that this Daniel wasn't *her* Daniel, but then—

Of course he was.

He never died. He had always been there. He was al-

ways hers and she was always his. All she wanted was to find his arms, to bury herself in their grasp. He would know what she should be doing; he would be able to help her. Why had she doubted him before?

She ran, pulled in the direction of his voice. But she couldn't see Daniel anywhere. Nor Luschka. A block away from the river, Luce stopped short in a barren intersection.

Her breath felt strangled in her frozen lungs. A cold, throbbing pain tunneled deep inside her ears, and the icy pinpricks stabbing her feet made standing still unbearable.

But which way should she go?

Before her was a vast and empty lot, filled with rubble and cordoned off from the street by scaffolding and an iron fence. But even in the darkness, Luce could tell that this was an older demolition, not something destroyed by a bomb in the air raids.

It didn't look like much, just an ugly, abandoned sinkhole. She didn't know why she was still standing in front of it. Why she'd stopped running after Daniel's voice—

Until she gripped the fence, blinked, and saw a flash of something brilliant.

A church. A majestic white church filling this gaping hole. A huge triptych of marble arches on the front façade. Five golden spires extending high into the sky. And inside:

rows of waxed wooden pews as far as the eye could see. An altar at the top of a white flight of stairs. And all the walls and high arched ceilings covered with gorgeously ornate frescoes. Angels everywhere.

The Church of Christ the Savior.

How did Luce know that? Why would she feel with every fiber of her being that this nothingness had once been a formidable white church?

Because she had been there moments before. She saw someone else's handprints in the ash on the metal: Luschka had stopped here, too, had gazed at the ruins of the church and felt something.

Luce gripped the railing and blinked again and saw herself—or Luschka—as a girl.

She was seated inside on one of the pews in a white lace dress. An organ played as people filed in before a service. The handsome man to her left must have been her father, and the woman next to him, her mother. There was the grandmother Luce had just met, and Kristina. Both of them looked younger, better fed. Luce remembered her grandmother saying that both her parents were dead. But here they looked so alive. They seemed to know everyone, greeting each family passing their pew. Luce studied her past self watching her father as he shook hands with a good-looking young blond man. The young man leaned down over the pew and smiled at her. He had the most beautiful violet eyes.

She blinked again and the vision disappeared. The lot was once again little more than rubble. She was freezing. And alone. Another bomb went off across the river, and the shock of it dropped Luce to her knees. She covered her face with her hands—

Until she heard someone softly crying. She lifted her head and squinted into the deeper darkness of the ruins, and she saw him.

“Daniel,” she whispered. He looked just the same. Almost radiating light, even in the freezing darkness. The blond hair she never wanted to stop running her fingers through, the violet-gray eyes that seemed to have been made to lock with hers. That formidable face, the high cheekbones, those lips. Her heart pounded and she had to tighten her grip on the iron fence to keep from running to him.

Because he wasn’t alone.

He was with Luschka. Consoling her, stroking her cheek and kissing her tears away. Their arms were wrapped around one another, their heads tipped forward in a never-ending kiss. They were so lost in their embrace they didn’t seem to feel the street rolling and quaking with another explosion. They looked like all there was in the world was just the two of them.

There was no space between their bodies. It was too dim to see where one of them ended and the other one began.

Lucinda got to her feet and crept forward, moving from one pile of rubble in the dark to the next, just longing to be closer to him.

"I thought I'd never find you," Luce heard her past self say.

"We will always find each other," Daniel answered, lifting her off the ground and squeezing her closer. "Always."

"Hey, you two!" A voice shouted from a doorway in a neighboring building. "Are you coming?"

Across the square from the empty lot, a small group of people were being herded into a solid stone building by a guy whose face Luce couldn't make out. That was where Luschka and Daniel were headed. It must have been their plan all along, to take shelter from the bombs together.

"Yes," Luschka called to the others. She looked at Daniel. "Let's go with them."

"No." His voice was curt. Nervous. Luce knew that tone all too well.

"We'll be safer off the street. Isn't this why we agreed to meet here?"

Daniel turned to look back behind them, his eyes sweeping right past the place where Luce was hiding. When the sky lit up with another round of golden-red explosions, Luschka screamed and buried her face in Daniel's chest. So Luce was the only one who saw his expression.

Something was weighing on him. Something greater than fear of the bombs.

Oh no.

“Daniil!” A boy near the building was still holding open the door to the shelter. “Luschka! Daniil!”

Everyone else was already inside.

That was when Daniil spun Luschka around, pulled her ear close to his lips. In her shadowy hiding place, Luce ached to know what he was whispering. If he was saying any of the things Daniel ever told *her* when she was upset or overwhelmed. She wanted to run to them, to pull Luschka away—but she couldn’t. Something deep inside her would not budge.

She fixed on Luschka’s expression as if her whole life depended on it.

Maybe it did.

Luschka nodded as Daniil spoke, and her face changed from terrified to calm, almost peaceful. She closed her eyes. She nodded one more time. Then she tipped back her head, and a smile spread slowly across her lips.

A smile?

But why? How? It was almost like she knew what was about to happen.

Daniil held her in his arms and dipped her low. He leaned in for another kiss, pressing his lips firmly against hers, running his hands through her hair, then down her sides, across every inch of her.

It was so passionate that Luce blushed, so intimate

she couldn't breathe, so gorgeous that she couldn't tear her eyes away. Not for a second.

Not even when Luschka screamed.

And burst into a column of searing white flame.

The cyclone of flames was otherworldly, fluid and almost elegant in a ghastly way, like a long silk scarf twisting around her pale body. It engulfed Luschka, flowed out of her and all around her, lighting up the spectacle of her burning limbs flailing, and flailing—and then not flailing anymore. Daniil didn't let go, not when the fire singed his clothes, not when he had to support the full weight of her slack, unconscious body, not when the flames burned away her flesh with an ugly, acrid hiss, not when her skin began to char and blacken.

Only when the blaze fizzled out—so fast, in the end, like the snuffing of a single candle—and there was nothing left to hold on to, nothing left but ashes, did Daniil drop his arms to his sides.

In all of Luce's wildest daydreams about going back and revisiting her past lives, she'd never once imagined this: her own death. The reality was more horrible than her darkest nightmares could ever have concocted. She stood in the cold snow, paralyzed by the vision, her body bereft of the capacity to move.

Daniil staggered back from the charred mass on the snow and began to weep. The tears streaming down his cheeks made clean tracks through the black soot that was all that was left of her. His face contorted. His

hands shook. They looked bare and big and empty to Luce, as if—even though the thought made her oddly jealous—his hands belonged around Luschka’s waist, in her hair, cupping her cheeks. What on earth did you do with your hands when the one thing they wanted to hold was suddenly, gruesomely gone? A whole girl, an entire life—gone.

The pain on his face took hold of Luce’s heart and squeezed, wringing her out completely. On top of all the pain and confusion she felt, seeing his agony was worse.

This was how he felt every life.

Every death.

Over and over and over again.

Luce had been wrong to imagine that Daniel was selfish. It wasn’t that he didn’t care. It was that he cared so much, it wrecked him. She still hated it, but she suddenly understood his bitterness, his reservations about everything. Miles might very well love her, but his love was nothing like Daniel’s.

It never could be.

“Daniel!” she cried, and left the shadows, racing toward him.

She wanted to return all the kisses and embraces she’d just witnessed him giving to her past self. She knew it was wrong, that everything was wrong.

Daniil’s eyes widened. A look of abject horror crossed his face.

“What is this?” he said slowly. Accusingly. As if he

hadn't just let his Luschka die. As if Luce's being there was worse than watching Luschka die. He raised his hand, painted black with ash, and pointed at her. "What's going on?"

It was agony to have him look at her this way. She stopped in her tracks and blinked a tear away.

"Answer him," someone said, a voice from the shadows. "How did you get here?"

Luce would have recognized the haughty voice anywhere. She didn't need to see Cam step out of the doorway of the bomb shelter.

With a soft snap and rumble like an enormous flag being unfurled, he extended his great wings. They stretched out behind him, making him even more magnificent and intimidating than usual. Luce couldn't keep herself from staring. They cast a gold-hued glow on the dark street.

Luce squinted, trying to make sense of the scene in front of her. There were more of them, more figures lurking in the shadows. Now they all stepped forward.

Gabbe. Roland. Molly. Arriane.

All of them were there. All with their wings arched tightly forward. A shimmering sea of gold and silver, blindingly bright on the dark street. They looked tense. Their wing tips quivered, as if ready to spring into battle.

For once, Luce didn't feel intimidated by the glory of

their wings or the weight of their gazes. She felt disgusted.

“Do you all watch it *every* time?” she asked.

“Luschka,” Gabbe said in an even voice. “Just tell us what’s going on.”

And then Daniil was there, gripping her shoulders. Shaking her.

“Luschka!”

“I’m not Luschka!” Luce shouted, breaking away from him and backing up a half dozen steps.

She was horrified. How they could live with themselves? How they could all just sit back and watch her die?

It was all too much. She wasn’t ready to see this.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” Daniil asked.

“She’s not who you think she is, Daniil,” Gabbe said. “Luschka’s dead. This is . . . this is—”

“*What is she?*” Daniil asked. “How is she standing here? When—”

“Look at her clothes. She’s clearly—”

“Shut up, Cam, she might not be,” Arriane said, but she looked fearful, too, that Luce might be whatever Cam was about to say she was. Another shrieking from the air, and then a blast of artillery shells raining down on the buildings across the street, deafening Luce, igniting a wooden warehouse. The angels had no concern for the war going on around them, only for her. There were

twenty feet now between Luce and the angels, and they looked as wary of her as she felt of them. None of them drew closer.

In the light from the smoldering building, Daniil's shadow was thrown far ahead of his body. She focused on summoning it to her. Would it work? Her eyes narrowed, and every muscle in her body tensed. She was still so clumsy at this, never knowing what it took to get the shadow into her hands.

When the dark lines began to quiver, she pounced. She gripped the shadow with both hands and started twirling the dark mass into a ball, just as she'd seen her teachers, Steven and Francesca, do on one of her first days at Shoreline. Just-summoned Announcers were always messy and amorphous. They needed first to be spun into a distinct contour. Only then could they be pulled and stretched into a larger flat surface. Then the Announcer would transform: into a screen through which to glimpse the past—or into a portal through which to step.

This Announcer was sticky, but she soon pulled it apart, guided it into shape. She reached inside and opened the portal.

She couldn't stay here any longer. She had a mission now: to find herself alive in another time and learn what price the Outcasts had referred to, and eventually, to trace the origin of the curse between Daniel and her.

Then to break it.

The others gasped as she manipulated the Announcer.

“When did you learn how to do that?” Daniil whispered.

Luce shook her head. Her explanation would only baffle Daniil.

“Lucinda!” The last thing she heard was his voice calling out her true name.

Strange, she’d been looking right at his stricken face but hadn’t seen his lips move. Her mind was playing tricks.

“Lucinda!” he shouted once more, his voice rising in panic, just before Luce dove headfirst into the beckoning darkness.

TWO



HEAVEN SENT

MOSCOW • OCTOBER 15, 1941

“Lucinda!” Daniel shouted again, but too late: In that instant she was gone. He had only just emerged into the bleak, snow-swept landscape. He’d felt a flash of light behind him and the heat of a blaze nearby, but all he could see was Luce. He rushed toward her on the darkened street corner. She looked tiny in someone else’s threadbare coat. She looked scared. He’d watched her open up a shadow and then—

“No!”

A rocket smashed into a building behind him. The

ground quaked, the street bucked and split, and a shower of glass and steel and concrete gathered up in the air and then rained down.

After that, the street went deadly quiet. But Daniel barely noticed. He just stood in disbelief among the debris.

“She’s going further back,” he muttered, brushing the dust from his shoulders.

“She’s going further back,” someone said.

That voice. *His* voice. An echo?

No, too close for an echo. Too clear to have come from inside his head.

“Who said that?” He dashed past a tangled mess of scaffolding to where Luce had been.

Two gasps.

Daniel was facing himself. Only not quite himself—an earlier version of himself, a slightly less cynical version of himself. But from when? Where was he?

“Don’t touch!” Cam shouted at both of them. He was dressed in an officer’s fatigues, combat boots, and a bulky black coat. At the sight of Daniel, his eyes blazed.

Unwittingly, both Daniels had drawn closer, stepping around one another in a cautious circle in the snow. Now they reared back.

“Stay away from me,” the older one warned the newer. “It’s dangerous.”

“I know that,” Daniel barked. “Don’t you think I

know that?” Just being this close made his stomach lurch. “I was here before. I am *you*.”

“What do you want?”

“I’m—” Daniel looked around, trying to get his bearings. After thousands of years of living, of loving Luce and losing her, the tissue of his memories had grown ragged. Repetition made the past hard to recall. But this place wasn’t so long ago, this place he remembered—

Desolate city. Snow on the streets. Fire in the sky.

It could have been one of a hundred wars.

But there—

The place on the street where the snow had melted. The dark crater in the sea of white. Daniel sank to his knees and reached for the ring of black ash stained on the ground. He closed his eyes. And he remembered the precise way she had died in his arms.

Moscow. 1941.

So this was what she was doing—tunneling into her past lives. Hoping to understand.

The thing was, there was no rhyme or reason to her deaths. More than anyone, Daniel knew *that*.

But there *were* certain lifetimes when he’d tried to shed some light for her, hoping it would change things. Sometimes he’d hoped to keep her alive longer, though that never really worked. Sometimes—like this time during the siege of Moscow—he’d chosen to send her on her way more quickly. To spare her. So that his kiss could be the last thing she felt in that lifetime.

And those were the lifetimes that cast the longest shadows across the eons. Those were the lifetimes that stood out and drew Luce like filings to a magnet as she stumbled through the Announcers. Those lives when he'd revealed to her what she needed to know, even though knowing it would destroy her.

Like her death in Moscow. He remembered it keenly and felt foolish. The daring words he'd whispered, the deep kiss he'd given her. The blissful realization on her face as she died. It had changed nothing. Her end was exactly the same as always.

And Daniel was exactly the same afterward, too: Bleak. Black. Empty. Guttled. Inconsolable.

Gabbe stepped forward to kick snow over the ring of ash where Luschka had died. Her featherlight wings glowed in the night and a shimmering aura surrounded her body as she hunched over in the snow. She was crying.

The rest of them came closer, too: Cam. Roland. Molly. Arriane.

And Daniil, long-ago Daniel, rounded out their motley group.

"If you're here to warn us about something," Arriane called, "then say your piece and go." Her iridescent wings folded forward, almost protectively. She stepped in front of Daniil, who looked a little green.

It was unlawful and unnatural for the angels to interact with their earlier selves. Daniel felt clammy and

faint—whether that was because he was having to relive Luce’s death or because he was so close to his previous self, he couldn’t say.

“Warn us?” Molly sneered, walking in a circle around Daniel. “Why would Daniel Grigori go out of his way to warn us about anything?” She got in his face, taunting him with her copper-colored wings. “No, I remember what he’s up to—this one has been skipping through the past for centuries. Always searching, always late.”

“No,” Daniel whispered. That couldn’t be. He’d set out to catch her and he would.

“What she means to ask,” Roland said to Daniel, “is what transpired to bring you here? From whenever you’re coming from?”

“I’d almost forgotten,” Cam said, massaging his temples. “He is after Lucinda. She has fallen out of time.” He turned to Daniel and raised an eyebrow. “Maybe now you’ll forsake your pride and ask for our help?”

“I don’t need help.”

“Seems as if you do,” Cam jeered.

“Stay out of it,” Daniel spat. “You’re enough trouble to us later.”

“Oh, how fun.” Cam clapped. “You’ve given me something to look forward to.”

“This is a dangerous game you’re playing, Daniel,” Roland said.

“I know that.”

Cam laughed a dark, sinister laugh. “So. We’ve finally reached the endgame, haven’t we?”

Gabbe swallowed. “So . . . something’s changed?”

“She’s figuring it out!” Arriane said. “She’s opening up Announcers and stepping through and she’s *still alive!*”

Daniel’s eyes blazed violet. He turned away from all of them, looking back at the ruins of the church, the first place where he’d laid eyes on Luschka. “I can’t stay. I have to catch her.”

“Well, from what I remember,” Cam said softly, “you never will. The past is already written, brother.”

“Your past, maybe. But not my future.” Daniel couldn’t think straight. His wings burned inside his body, aching to be released. She was gone. The street was empty. No one else to worry about.

He threw his shoulders back and let them out with a whoosh. There. That lightness. That deepest freedom. He could think more clearly now. What he needed was a moment alone. With himself. He shot the other Daniel a look and took off into the sky.

Moments later, he heard the sound again: the same whoosh of wings unfurling—the sound of another pair of wings, younger wings, taking flight from the ground below.

Daniel’s earlier self caught up with him in the sky. “Where to?”

Wordlessly they settled on a third-story ledge near Patriarch's Pond, on the roof across from Luce's window, where they used to watch her sleep. The memory would be fresher in Daniil's mind, but the faint recollection of Luce lying dreaming under the covers still sent a warm rush across Daniel's wings.

Both were somber. In the bombed-out city, it was sad and ironic that her building had been spared when she hadn't. They stood in silence in the cold night, both carefully tucking back their wings so that they wouldn't accidentally touch.

"How are things for her in the future?"

Daniel sighed. "The good news is that something is different in this lifetime. Somehow the curse has been . . . altered."

"How?" Daniil looked up, and the hope that shone bright in his eyes darkened. "You mean to say, in her current lifetime she has not yet made a covenant?"

"We think not. That's part of it. It seems a loophole has opened up and allowed her to live beyond her usual time—"

"But it's so dangerous." Daniil spoke quickly, frantically, spewing out the same discourse that had been running through Daniel's mind ever since the last night at Sword & Cross, when he'd realized that this time was different: "She could die and not come back. That could be *the* end. Every single thing is on the line now."

“I know.”

Daniil stopped, composed himself. “I’m sorry. Of course you know. But . . . the question is, does *she* understand why this life is different?”

Daniel looked at his empty hands. “One of the Elders of Zhsmaelim got to her, interrogated her before Luce knew anything about her past. Lucinda recognizes that everyone is focused on the fact that she has not been baptized . . . but there is so much she doesn’t know.”

Daniil stepped to the edge of the roof and gazed at her dark window. “Then what’s the bad news?”

“I fear there is also much that I don’t know. I cannot predict the consequences of her fleeing backward into time if I don’t find her, and stop her, before it’s too late.”

Down on the street, a siren blared. The air raid was over. Soon the Russians would be out combing the city, looking for survivors.

Daniel sifted through the shreds of his memory. *She was going further back—but to which lifetime?* He turned to look hard at his earlier self. “You recall it, too, don’t you?”

“That . . . she is going back?”

“Yes. But how far back?” They spoke simultaneously, staring at the dark street.

“And where will she stop?” Daniel said abruptly,

backing away from the edge. He closed his eyes, took a breath. “Luce is different now. She’s—” He could almost smell her. Clean, pure light, like sunshine. “Something fundamental has shifted. We finally have a real chance. And I—I have never been more elated . . . nor more sick with terror.” He opened his eyes and was surprised to see Daniil nod.

“Daniel?”

“Yes?”

“What are you waiting for?” Daniil asked with a smile. “Go get her.”

And with that, Daniel teased open a shadow along the roof ledge—an Announcer—and stepped inside.

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